

Meeting in Spain - Personal feedback - German point of view

According to the COMENIUS Handbook



Only a few weeks have passed and here we meet again: in Badajoz, Spain. For all of us it was not so easy to reach this town, coming from all directions, landing at different airports, finally arriving by bus or even by taxi – due to some rather complicated flight schedules. We discovered a city and a region which is not a main destination on touristic routes, but this gave us the possibility to become familiar with the true, everyday Spanish way of life – far from holiday resorts.



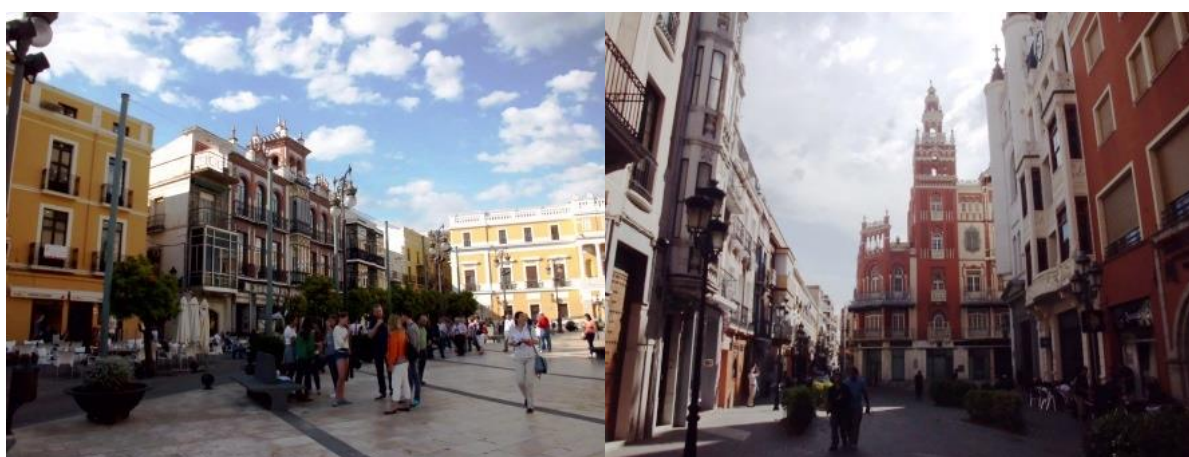
Charming guides showed us around and proudly presented their school to us. We saw a well-equipped school, beautifully decorated classrooms and floors,

according to the needs of each age group, making us feel at home in a very welcoming atmosphere. The fact that pupils voluntarily wear their school uniforms shows that they really identify with their school and its aims.



While we were having the first discussions with our Spanish colleagues and each of us accompanied them into their various classrooms, pupils enjoyed Getting-to-know-you games in the school yard and soon everybody had become familiar with our hosts.

No time to lose: project work started at once with the presentations of costumes and folk music in all our countries. After the lunch break we set off for our guided walking tour around Badajoz and discovered the beauty of the city, rooted in the past, but long years of wars not only in medieval times have made it a hidden treasure in our times.



The city of Olivenzas which we visited on the following day is just one example of historical disputes which exist until today. Both countries, Spain and Portugal, claim this territory de iure, citing treaties from the late 13th century to the congress of Vienna at the beginning of the 19th century. Today there is a peaceful agreement, on both sides of the Spanish-Portuguese border cities cooperate, and we could taste Portuguese cakes in a Spanish town.

One of the attractions of Olivenzas is the bull ring which was inaugurated in 1868. Queen Isabel II signed the Royal Order for its construction in 1857. Today 5,600 spectators can follow the bull fights.



Bullfight is deeply rooted in Spanish culture, and after exploring Olivenzas we continued our excursion to visit the finca Los Fresnos where we learned a lot about how fighting bulls are raised and chosen, living in an animals' paradise for three years until they have become old enough to face the final fight in which the matador has to follow strict rules so that the dignity of the bull is respected and the bull will suffer as little as possible in the moment of its death. But of course, bullfighting is a highly controversial topic - not only in our, the guests', countries.



The landscape of this area, a man-made environment since Roman times, is called dehesas, widely stretched forests of holm- and cork oaks, where the trees are thinly spread. Dehesas offer breeding grounds to black vultures and Spanish imperial eagles. They are of great importance to overwintering cranes and a home to numerous storks.

Visiting Cáceres and Mérida could be seen as a follow-up to our excursions in Turkey where we explored the traces of antique settlements.

The Roman province of Lusitania covered in ancient times today's Extremadura. Mérida became the capital of the Roman province of Lusitania and one of the most important cities in the Roman Empire. Today it is the capital of Extremadura.

The town was founded in 25 BC, with the name of Emerita Augusta which refers to the veterans of the army of Augustus. The city has seen many different rulers, the Visigoths, the domination of bishops, the Arabs, until it was brought under Christian rule in 1230 by Alfonso IX .

During Roman times, numerous representative buildings were erected: theater, amphitheater, circus, temples, bridges and aqueducts. In 1993 Mérida was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and we discovered it by visiting the National Museum of Roman Art.



Our guide did not forget to mention that the best preserved Roman monuments are mostly not found in Europe, but Turkey, e.g. Ephesus. Yes, we remember!

Another trip into the past led us to Cáceres, a Roman foundation as a strategic city back in 25 BC, which was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1986, because the old town combines Roman, Islamic, Northern Gothic, and Italian Renaissance architectural influences.

The ancient walls contain a medieval town and this part of town is also well known for its storks' nests.



The celebration of St. George, the patron saint of Cáceres, takes place each year on April 23, and another important cultural and religious event in April is the *Bajada de la Virgen de la Montaña*, also a patron saint, when the statue of the Madonna is brought down to the city.

The first descent of the Virgin of the Mountain to the city of Cáceres was on May 3, 1641 and its purpose was to say a prayer in consequence of a severe drought that plagued the region. The procession became an annual tradition. During this time, various charity events take place.

Multiculturalism through the ages, still 1
past to the present. Foreign language learning is a starting point for

understanding foreign cultures. There are lots of languages in Europe, and even if in 2009 the European Commission stated as an objective that every citizen in the EU should be able to communicate in at least two foreign languages in addition to his native language, reality is far from reaching this aim, especially as regards the conditions of learning a second foreign language at schools.

So what to do? Well, let's try body language!

And while presenting and demonstrating the results of examples of body language in our countries, we were an interested audience that had a lot of fun – while learning how to behave correctly in another country – even without words 😊.



The teachers then had to meet in order to discuss and prepare the final project meeting, advanced by an improvised video conference. Our pupils took part in another intercultural event: the last day of the Portuguese Week at the Colegio Maristas, for which classes had prepared a fun or challenging activity. Then work was done and we set off for the town hall where we had the honor of being received by the mayor in the beautifully decorated plenary hall.



Friday early afternoon: our stay in Spain was about to end, but not before the ultimate big event: Fiesta, with Paella, Music and Dance!



And about music: my special thanks go to the pupils of a 6th grade who welcomed me in their classroom with giving a recorder concert of the European hymn, and they also impressed me deeply with their rhythm exercises – doing much better than I did.

Body language can support understanding, but music really unites across borders: best to be experienced during the last afternoon of this meeting!

Business as usual: we were able to continue our work according to the work plan, project activities were discussed in our closed Facebook group, messages, questions and answers concerning organization were exchanged via email, pupils' contributions were collected and uploaded to Google slides, then published in the Twinspace, and the body language pics were taken to Spain and stuck on a big wallpaper. The only problem: to choose which ones???

There was no problem at all for the participating pupils to communicate. It seems that after so many meetings and lots of pupils telling their classmates about the meetings, they all know what it means. The friendliness, the hospitality, the open-mindedness of the Spanish partners helped our pupils a lot to feel comfortable from the first moment on. Their partners' curiosity, their questions made it easy for our pupils to talk and to improve their communication skills. The ice-breaking activities which the pupils had prepared were much fun and they all became acquainted with each other very quickly. Amazing: a school yard where you can listen to music played in the breaks!

Parents, too, were highly interested, supported the project, took part in the school yard fiesta and enjoyed it like we did. Deep sympathy on both sides – across language barriers . With or without knowledge of English: the same is valid for our Spanish colleagues, and yes, the coordinators are a close team that works very effectively – in my opinion. No communication problems in Europe ☺



PS

COMENIUS-Handbook p. 32, CHECKLIST: INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY IN A PROJECT self-understood, even if video conferencing technology did not work as planned, but the video conference had to be improvised a bit.